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ABSTRACT

Fairy tales can be used in the classroom to promote normal growth and development as well as carry a message of hope and faith in the strength and goodness of humans. Because fairy tales are imaginative literature, readers can safely experience and work through scary situations which are analogous to situations in real life. Bibliotherapy refers to the basic concept that literature has therapeutic properties and is a program of activity based on the interactive processes of media and those who experience it. The therapeutic properties of reading are useful in education to support life adjustment, psychological maturity and moral development. (JAC)

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USING FAIRY TALES TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND OTHERS

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The advent of the nuclear age brought the necessity of world peace more clearly to the eyes of the technologically advanced countries. However, the frequency and violence of the smaller wars and conflicts which have occured since the second World War indicate that the desire for world peace has not yet reached fruition. It is becoming increasingly apparent that world peace will not just miraculously happen, but rather, will only result if sufficient effort is directed towards this goal. The solution will involve a fundamental change in the way other countries and their citizens are viewed. This change will need to involve as many people as possible, not just the leaders and the diplomats. This paper will focus on the possibility of assisting this changing point of view through the therapeutic use of literature (bibliotherapy) in the classroom.

Definition and Brief History of Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy refers to the basic concept that literature has therapeutic properties. Rubin (1978b) defined bibliotherapy as "a program of activity based on the interactive processes of media and the people who experience it. Print or nonprint material, either imaginative or informational, is experienced and discussed with the aid of a facilitator."

The therapeutic properties of reading were recognized back in the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Greeks inscribed "Place of Healing for the Soul" and "Medicine for the Soul" over their library doors. The Romans thought that reading orations to the mentally distressed was beneficial. Religious reading was a common practice in prisons and mental institutions during the middle ages. In the United States, bibliotherapy has been used extensively by both the Veterans Administration and the Menninger Foundation for over 50 years.

Theoretical Base for Bibliotherapy

There is a varied theoretical base for bibliotherapy which encompasses a psychoanalytic vein, a Gestalt and field theory vein, and a social learning vein. Basically, all three approaches involve what Shiryon (in Rubin, 1978A) called "taking a second look." This second look investigates one's own behaviors and emotions and the world around one. Shiryon listed three ways of perceiving:

1. logic--the reasoning aspect
2. fantasy--the imaginative aspect
3. emotional reaction--the experiential aspect

Shiryon wrote that most psychotherapy focuses on only one or two of the three aspects and the client must adjust to the focus of that therapy. Bibliotherapy, however, uses all three aspects and the client chooses the proportions of each with which she/he will be most comfortable. Furthermore, the stories provide a paradox which is helpful to the client as they provide distance so that the reader can feel like an observer, weigh issues, and make objective judgments. The stories also provide a sense of closeness so the reader may feel involved. Shrodes (1949) stated that this paradox of immediacy and distance enables the reader to experience what she/he would otherwise be unable to experience. Alston (1962) added that literature lacks the same demands and prohibitions that the verbal word does so literature can be approached with minimal defensiveness. Zaccaria and Moses (1968) wrote that literature allows an individual to practice, in his/her imagination, different actions and experience the resulting consequences. It also permits the individual to experience vicariously things which have been repressed or censored due to guilt or fear. Literature can also suggest ways to express socially unacceptable impulses (aggression, dominance, revenge, etc.) in socially acceptable

ways. Finally, according to these authors, literature can start a process of inner adjustment which modifies the reader's reaction to the next person or situation.

Use of Bibliotherapy in Education

Reischauer (1973) presented an argument for the active use of education to anticipate future problems for world unity and educate children so they would be prepared to handle these crises as adults. He described it as "education for a world community." One necessary element, he believed, was the development of a sense of world community and citizenship.

Zaccaria and Moses (1968) discussed three philosophies of education which could be viewed as supportive of the kind of education Reischauer advocates:

1. education for life adjustment--purpose of education is to give youth skills and attitudes with which to cope with the situations and problems of everyday life
2. education for psychological maturity--goal is to help develop attitudes of self-understanding and self-acceptance
3. education for moral character development--function of education is to teach individuals the right thing to do; the emphasis is on honesty, truthfulness, and industry

These three philosophies can be used as subcategories of developmental bibliotherapy as described by Rubin (1978b). The use of developmental bibliotherapy focuses on promoting normal development, self-actualization, the maintenance of mental health, or coping with personal problems such as divorce, sickness, death, or prejudice.

McKinney (1975) reported an unpublished study which measured the personality characteristics of college students who become more involved in fiction. These students were found to be more self-sufficient, imaginative, emotionally responsive, sensitive and creative. The males were also more placid, relaxed, non-anxious, and experimenting and liberal in their thinking. The females were also somewhat more assertive and aggressive.

Rubin (1978a) quotes Shrodes (1949) who described the benefits of bibliotherapy in the following way:

> It is important for therapy that the individual should extend his experiences beyond the familiar and immediate that he may develop both a sense of belongingness to all other human beings and a feeling of tolerance and sympathy for lives alien to his own.
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> Since literature provides an awareness of the dignity and worth of the individual human life, however humble or unsuccessful in the world's view, the reader may gain a sense of self respect.
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> It (literature) may enrich the reader's understanding of other people and lessen his fear of 'stranger,' for it reaches his emotions as well as his intellect.... If he extends his experience of love and hate, pity and fear, he can no longer remain insular and chauvinist. He becomes aware of man's universal struggle against forces that impede the full development of his potential. The recognition of human likeness helps to dissolve the barriers between sex, nationality, race and class.

Use of Fairy Tales in Bibliotherapy

The reasons for using fairy tales in bibliotherapy focus on the concept that using imaginative literature can give the individual a safe way to experience new thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Bettelheim (1975) wrote that fairy tales can be used with all age groups and that each individual will take from the fairy tale the things she/he needs. Fairy tales give people a way to use their imaginations to deal with their problems and helps them find deeper meaning in their

lives and struggles. Carlsen (1975) wrote that different types of literature appeal to different age groups and that the college age group tend to prefer stories which deal with values, social significance, strange and unusual experiences, and themes of transition to adult life. Fairy tales frequently meet all these criteria and therefore could have possible value for use with college students.

Fairy tales show very openly what human nature and behavior are and both praises and laments them. Overall, however, the seal or sign of a true fairy tale is joy. Fairy tales strive to do two seemingly mutually exclusive things: to provide an escape from the earthboundness of life and also to bind the individual to this world. This is expressive of the paradox of the human person--the two aspects of a single unity.

It is the human aspect that makes fairy tales enduring and haunting. The reader is able to open up the human characters and crawl into their skins. The basic existence is the same and is capable of being shared. As Buchan (1931) wrote:

> These tales come out of the most distant depths of human experience and fancy. They belong to the people themselves, not to a specially gifted or privileged class, and they are full of their homely origin. They deal with simple and enduring things, birth, and marriage and death, hunger and thirst, natural sorrows and natural joys. They sprang from a society when life was hard, when a man was never quite certain of his next meal, when he never knew when he arose in the morning whether he would be alive in the evening, when adventure was not the exception in life, but the rule. It was a dangerous world and a cruel world, and therefore those who dwelt in it endeavoured in their tales to escape from it. They pictured weakness winning against might, gentleness and courtesy against brutality, brains against mere animal strength, the one chance in a hundred succeeding. ...they 'thought nobly of the soul.' The true hero in all the folk tales and fairy tales is not the younger son, or the younger daughter, or the stolen princess, or the ugly duckling, but the soul of man.
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> ...the people who made them realized that the hope of humanity lay not in passivity but in action.

In fairy tales one sees that which the human being sees in him/herself--both the way she/he is and the way she/he would like to be. Haughton (1973) wrote that "Fairy tales are never deliberately symbolic, yet they embody mankind's shrewdest and most realistic insights into human nature. We can use them to orient ourselves in the present, and discover which way to go.... Fairy tales can open our minds to the human."

Fairy tales are good, universal stories. Haughton (1973) wrote that they are common to all cultures and have withstood the test of time. Throughout time and in all cultures the same themes recur so they cannot be attributed to merely a result of a particular set of moral values. A common theme in fairy tales is the "survival of the unfittest." This has importance in terms of how the human person views him/herself and his/her fellow persons. Buchan (1931) wrote that this theme is

> ...based on the incurable optimism of human nature...the handsome swashbuckling gallant is all very well, but the folk mind did not think too highly of him. It suspected the obviously heroic and preferred to look deeper for quality.
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> The rights of heredity, of personal possession, of feudal-type fealty, are among the variety of principles upon which the world depends for its strength and continuation. But they will not make man human, say the fairy tales: there is a principle more powerful than any of these, and nothing you can do will alter it, because this is the fundamental law of man's spiritual nature. The youngest son, the fool, the dreamer, the unmeritorious, socially and psychologically underprivileged--he is the one who inherits the earth.

The evil creatures in fairy tales demonstrate that which the story teller cries out against and would change in human nature and behavior if she/he could. All fairy tales have a lesson to teach or a creed to suggest. They glorify the human soul and revive hope by pointing out humanity's forgotten graces and depths. The quest of the fairy tale is always for something good and this good can be characterized as the salvation of all people. Storytellers see this as the goal and nature

of all people whether or not they are conscious of it. Fairy tales give support and encouragement to the reader to pursue this quest by the example the hero sets. Frequently, the heroes do not have the foggiest notion about how they are to attain their goal, they just obey the commands given. Frequently, misfortunes befall them and all seems dark and lost but if they remain faithful and obedient they will come to their goal. At the goal they must fight and work to attain that which they seek and by attaining it and bringing it back to the one who presented the call, the hero is changed as a result of his labors. Love and goodness appear to be the forces which make these deeds possible.

Fairy Tales

The use of fairy tales in the classroom to promote a more positive self-concept and view of others means one must get the students actively involved in the stories. Discussing solely the aesthetic or literary quality of the tales is not likely to lead to any change. The focus needs to be placed on the human aspects of the story, on the actions and feelings of the human characters. A number of ways this can be done are:

1. Use fairy tales to discuss certain topics or themes such as aging, work, evil in the world, death and dying, growing up.
2. Have the students write their own fairy tales and discuss them in class.
3. Show movies of fairy tales followed by discussions on the characters and their actions.
4. Have the students do dramatic readings or write and perform plays based on fairy tales.

Summary

Fairy tales can be used in a variety of ways in the classroom to promote normal growth and development. Because they are a type of imaginative literature, the individual can safely experience and work through scary situations which are analogous to situations in their own lives. In addition, fairy tales carry a message of hope and faith in the strength and goodness of the human person.

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